

American: The Bill Hicks Story

UK 2010

Directed by
Matt Harlock
Paul Thomas**Animation**
Matt Harlock
Paul Thomas**Early Years Animation**
Graham Smith**Featuring the Music of**
Bill Hicks
Marblehead Johnson**With***In order of appearance*Bill Hicks
Dwight Slade
Mary Hicks
Steve Hicks
Lynn Hicks
Kevin Booth
James Ladmirault
David Johndrow

107 minutes

*Our next screening...***Micmacs** (France)

Tue 13 December 2011

Dir: Jean-Pierre Jeunet

Whimsical fantasy & oodles
of imagination from the
director of *Delicatessen*.

Winchester Film Society is delighted to welcome director Matt Harlock to tonight's special event. Matt will introduce the film and hold a Q&A immediately after. Everyone at WFS would like to pass on their huge thanks to Matt for joining us tonight.

Since his passing in 1994, the image of maverick US comedian Bill Hicks has been adopted as a crude totem that equates chain-smoking and invective with a vague, post-punk defiance. As this exhaustive, moving documentary confirms, not only did Hicks's fiery, ultra-articulate belligerence make him a rebel with a cause but he carried with him a permanent sadness relating to how his comedy was received and the state of the world. Painstakingly recreating the testimony of friends and family by manipulating and animating archive photographs, the directors tell Hicks's story in a clear, linear fashion and never push for undue meaning. The breadth and quality of the archive is nothing short of astounding – there's even grainy VHS footage of his endless tours through dives such as The Comedy Pouch in Possum Ridge, Arkansas – so even those who shrug at his combative style of humour won't be able to deny that this is a model of detailed and distanced biographical filmmaking.

David Jenkins, *Time Out London*

Can it really be 16 years since Bill Hicks died? Watching *American*, you'd swear the world's first rock'n'roll comedian was still plying his trade. And that's the greatest triumph of Matt Harlock and Paul Thomas's terrific film - while many biographical documentaries reduce their subjects to museum pieces, *American* presents the erstwhile Goat Boy as a force of nature, as vital and essential as he ever was. Using subtle photo animation to spice-up what would otherwise be an orgy of talking-head material, the director-producers easily eclipse previous Hicks projects such as *It's Just A Ride*. To hear Bill's adoring brother and beautiful sister chat about their lost sibling is a joy only eclipsed by flicking through the Hicks' photo albums, an opportunity made possible by the creatives' close relationship with the family. What truly elevates *American* are the yards of rare performance footage. Bill seeming impossibly assured as a 16-year-old, Bill pouring scorn upon the people of Chicago, Bill playing his final gig at Igby's Comedy Club: there's real gold here, together with choice cuts from Hicks' celebrated concert films *Relentless* and *Revelations*. As a 104 minute study of the 'Prince Of Darkness', it's hard to imagine how this could be improved upon.

Richard Luck, *Film4*



Voting for *City of Life and Death*: A-39 B-13 C-6 D-0 E-1 Attendance: 67 Rating: 87.7%